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AG critical of poultry promos

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Ads sponsored by the poultry industry are designed to damage Attorney General Drew Edmondson's re-election campaign, Edmondson said Monday.

Edmondson wouldn't say if he thinks the ads violated state Ethics Commission campaign laws, but he doesn't plan to file a complaint with the state Ethics Commission.

Ethics Commission Executive Director Marilyn Hughes declined to say Monday whether the ads violated any campaign expenditure laws.

However, The Associated Press quoted Hughes as saying the ads by the Poultry Community Council walk "a fine line" in following election laws.

"It certainly looks to me like an electioneering communication that would have to be reported," the AP quoted Hughes as saying.

The controversy stems from a series of television, radio and newspaper advertisements that began appearing across the state earlier this year.

One television ad features an Oklahoma poultry grower, Bev Saunders, addressing the poultry litter issue.

"I'm sure you've heard the attorney general accusing farmers just like me of breaking the law when it comes to applying poultry litter as fertilizer to our lands" Saunders says in the ad. "That's just plain wrong."

She goes on to say poultry growers don't break the law when they use litter as fertilizer.

The newspaper ads, according to a July 28-dated press release issued on behalf of the poultry industry, are designed to "shed light on Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson's continual distortion of the truth." The ads will run indefinitely, according to the news release.

"Never at anytime" did those behind the Poultry Community Council consider the organization to be a political action committee, said Archie Schaffer III, a spokesman for Tyson Foods Inc., and the council.

The Poultry Community Council was created about 1 1/2 years ago by companies involved in the litigation and as well as other industry supporters, Schaffer said. The council's purpose is to "educate the general public about the poultry industry, how we run our business, what we do and don't do, (and) what we are doing to address concerns about our impact on the environment over there."

Edmondson, on behalf of the state, filed a federal lawsuit in 2005 against 13 poultry

companies regarding the use of poultry litter as a fertilizer on fields within the Illinois River watershed.

Edmondson claims the litter, a combination of bedding material and poultry waste, pollutes the rivers, lakes and streams when excess amounts wash from the fields when it rains.

The campaign is designed to hurt his re-election chances and taint the jury pool for a future trial, Edmonson said Monday.

For advertising to be electioneering, and subject to state ethics laws, Hughes said is has to state a "clearly identified candidate."

Only the Ethics Commission could determine if the ads in question meet that standard.

Edmondson, a Democrat, faces Republican James Dunn in the Nov. 7 general election.

Should the Ethics Commission determine that an unreported electioneering communication has occurred, it has the option of: issuing a private or public reprimand, entering into a settlement agreement that includes payment of a fine or taking the case to district court for enforcement of civil penalties, Hughes said.

Dunn said he didn't believe the ads violated any Ethics Commission campaign reporting laws.

"I don't believe these ads were designed to help me because, quite frankly, I believe they started running these ads before . . . they ever even took our campaign serious," Dunn said. "I've had absolutely no control, no input, nothing when it comes to putting on their ads."

Schaffer said he would be surprised, if the Ethics Commission found the rules were violated.

"I have a hard time believing they will conclude that is a PAC and should be registered as such," Schaffer said.

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At issue

Ads created by the Poultry Community Council appearing in Oklahoma media are meant to educate the public about the poultry industry, a Tyson Foods spokesman says.

Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson says the ads are an effort to hurt his re-election chances.

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